

# Mercury News

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[5 big whale festivals in Northern California...](#)

## 5 big whale festivals in Northern California for spring 2025

Celebrate the annual migration with whale walks, beach fires, chowder and wine tastings, whale-themed music and more.



Two humpbacks were spotted breaching out of the water at the same time on Nov. 26, 2024, a rare moment caught on film. (Photo courtesy of Nona Reimer/ Dana Wharf)



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Majestic [gray whales](#) migrate off the California coast in spring and, like barnacles hoping to latch on, thousands of people flock to see them.

This year will bring more whale festivals than in previous years, mostly due to Covid and other forces of nature cancelling some recent years' celebrations. Does that mean there will be more whales? You'll just have to go find out.

In order of dates, here are five whale fests to enjoy in spring 2025. Note: While many of [Mendocino County's shebangs](#) take place over a weekend, Saturday is usually the day with the loaded event schedule.

### **Mendocino Whale Festival: March 1-2**

This annual biggie splits whale activities across two days of fun. On Saturday, there will be a chowder tasting (10 a.m.-noon, \$20) at the Crown Hall banquet room featuring local restaurants and a wine walk (noon-3 p.m., \$65) through Mendocino's bevy of quaint shops.

On Sunday, the [Ford House Visitor Center & Museum in Mendocino](#) will hold a gray whale symposium from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with tips on how to spot these creatures, with binoculars provided. That day will also have guided whale walks from 11 a.m. to noon and 1 to 2 p.m. along the Mendocino Headlands. The walks, which are led by California State Park interpreters, are dog-friendly, but best leave strollers at home due to the bumpy trails.

Details: [mendocinocoast.com/mendocino-whale-festival](https://mendocinocoast.com/mendocino-whale-festival)

### **Little River Whale Festival: March 7-8**

This fest kicks off on Friday, March 7, in the whale's backyard of Van Damme State Park, with a sunset gathering on the beach featuring whale stories, songs, trivia, hot cocoa and s'mores roasting over campfires (6 -7 p.m.).

On Saturday, there will be a walk on the historic [Van Damme Spring Ranch property](#) to scout the ocean for whales, with binoculars provided. The event will be canceled if severe weather occurs (11 a.m.-noon and 1-2 p.m.). Also on Saturday is a Margarita Madness bash at the [Little River Inn](#) with bartenders competing for tequila-based glory. Attendees can judge up to six margaritas, with tickets going to support Mendocino coastal parks (\$75).

Details: [mendocinocoast.com/whale-home](https://mendocinocoast.com/whale-home)

### **Fort Bragg Whale Fest: March 15-17**

This coastal city has a whale of an events roster this year. On Saturday, visitors can get athletic at the 37th annual Whale Run & Fun Walk along the coastal trail in Fort Bragg. Sign up by March 9 (cheaper prices before Feb. 28) for various runs including a half-marathon, 5K and a kiddie's race (8:30-noon, [whalerun.org](https://whalerun.org)).

Most of the other events take place that same Saturday. There are too many to list here, but you can expect a chowder tasting (\$20) at Fort Bragg’s City Hall gymnasium and a Rotary Beer Fest at Eagles hall with live music and barbecue (noon-4 p.m., ticket info coming soon, [fortbraggrotary.com](http://fortbraggrotary.com)). On Sunday, there is a free whale-skeleton painting event at [MacKerricher State Park in Fort Bragg](#), in which visitors can slap protective paint on the articulated bones of a 30-foot gray whale.

And the Symphony of the Redwoods will perform concerts both days with water themes tying together orchestral masterpieces at the Cotton Auditorium. Think Handel’s “Water Music,” Britten’s “Sea Interludes” and the American premiere of Alexis Aranda’s “Acqua.” Show times are 7:30 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday; \$15-\$30, [symphonyoftheredwoods.org](http://symphonyoftheredwoods.org). Details: [visitfortbraggca.com/whalefest](http://visitfortbraggca.com/whalefest)



A humpback whale lunges off Linda Mar Beach in Pacifica, Calif., Wednesday, Aug. 7, 2024. (Karl Mondon/ Bay Area News Group)

### **Whalefest Monterey: April 12-13**

The 15th annual Whalefest takes place on Monterey’s historic, fish-scented Old Fisherman’s Wharf. It’s a big draw for serious whale enthusiasts. Expect marine experts sharing their best whale tales and conservation lessons, with talks this year including

“Whale Entanglement: Risks, Responses and Prevention” and “The Unseen and Unsung Heroes of Monterey Bay: the Beautiful, Amazing Microscopic Plankton!”

Aside from engaging science, there will also be live music, interactive marine exhibits, sea-themed crafts like scrimshaw and *gyotaku* — the traditional Japanese method of “printing fish,” who knew? — and the opportunity to tour research and rescue vessels. Oh, and don’t forget the crowd-favorite Abalone Races. (Free, [whalefest.org](http://whalefest.org))

### **Sonoma-Mendocino Coast Whale and Jazz Festival: April, 2025**

This quirky festival on the Sonoma coast, which is more about music than mammoths, usually runs in April to coincide with the [Smithsonian Institution’s Jazz Appreciation Month](#).

There are typically live jazz performances; jazz-related films, poetry and art; a chowder challenge and tasting; and scientific discourses about whales given by local experts. All this happens in lovely natural settings, including wineries and restaurants by the ocean. The place to check for updates as April grows nearer is the Gualala Arts Center, definitely worth a visit among the coastal redwoods. (Free, [gualalaarts.org](http://gualalaarts.org))

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